

Langhorne Players Take Plunge Into Comedy With "High Dive"

The Langhorne Players make a splash this Friday evening with the opening of their production of "High Dive," a clever comedy based on the life of playwright Leslie Ayavazian. A cast of eight bring to life dozens of characters in a funny play that uses a diving board as a metaphor for the central character, Leslie's, struggle to accept turning fifty.

Langhorne Players veteran Lois Carr plays Leslie, and she auditioned for the part because, "I'm like her. I could relate to the storytelling, and I've had the experience of turning fifty. I didn't have the trouble she did, though. I looked forward to it and just thought it was funny. But I identify with her enthusiasm in wanting to take risks."

This courageous, playful attitude sets the tone for the entire production, which — like all Langhorne plays — takes risks in its approach to the material and its daring, funky set. Not quite as minimalist as most of their sets, the stage uses scrims and special lighting effects to mimic the bottom of a swimming pool, and the theme carries through even to the rear of the theater behind the audience seating. The effect is absorbing, bringing viewers into the production instead of making them sit outside of it; enhancing the intimacy already present in the 73-seat theater.

Director Curtis Herr, a passionate, hands-on guy, created most of the scrims and other props. He had a vision of the atmosphere he wanted to create for the play and ran with it. "I love the whole idea of the transition at fifty. It's all about living life and taking risk after risk.

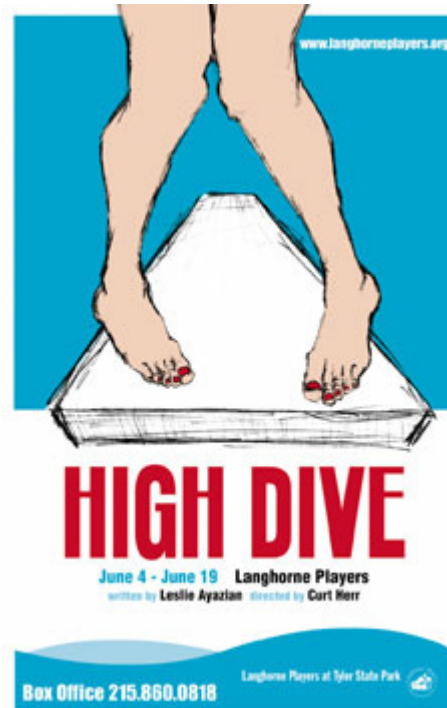
"We've never done a show like this," Herr continues. "The tech, the style, new lighting special effects. Rich (Herr's partner and Players president) was able to get really creative with the lighting." This adventuresome spirit shows in the pool-like border surrounding the stage, a wild splay of swirling blue paint reminiscent of Van Gogh's "Starry Night."

Herr has a unique take on live theater. "I love what happens on stage. It's just like this huge Valentine, or those little Advent calendars where you open those little doors and there's a present inside. It's a gift to our audiences, who take the risk buying tickets for shows they never heard of."

Carr illuminates her "High Dive" central character's struggle: "I think through this whole thing, she wants so badly to be something she's not. This play is the story of her coming to grips with taking that leap.

Barbara Katz, a Players board member, portrays multiple characters in the play, which she auditioned for because she liked the reading from her experience on the Seasonal Selection committee. Her son, Matt, is part of the crew. Aaron Wexler, just off the successful run of "Dirty Blonde," the group's season opener, also plays multiple parts. Another multi-part player is Pam Simancik, former stage manager at the Academy Theater who is making her debut with the Langhorne Players. "Everyone here is so professional and dedicated to the show," she says. "I'm already looking forward to their next auditions."

Joe Szumila plays the part of Leslie's father, along with other parts. "It's very rewarding to bring all those different characters to life," he says of this acting effort. "The audience is in for an hour of great visual and audio experience. Emma Gilger is another multi-part actor, who tried out for the play because she admires Herr's directing ability. She "saw how it read and wanted to see how it would be staged." Emma is thrilled to be back with the Players after a seven-year hiatus. "You get unique theater here. It's cheaper than going to the movies, and you get an A-1 class production company. This is not community theater."



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Corin Gryparis, age 10, plays Leslie's son and is equally enthusiastic about his first acting experience outside of school plays. "It's the best thing that's happened in my life," he says. "I just like getting up and doing it. My parents say I'm going to be the next Jim Carrey." The play is an apt way for Corin to kick off a time of new experiences in his life: When the run is over, he'll be leaving for Australia to accompany his mother and sister on a semester-long visit for his mom's Master's degree study.

Stage manager John Sepples keeps things moving along backstage in this fast-paced production. "I like being involved in the rehearsals, and having some influence on how the production plays out," he says.

"High Dive" opens Friday, June 4th, and runs through June 19th. Show times are Wed., Thur. And Sun. at 7:30 PM, Fri. and Sat. at 8:30 PM. Tickets are \$10 and \$12, and can be reserved by calling the box office at 215-860-0818. The Langhorne Players home stage is at the historic Spring Garden Mill in Tyler State Park, Newtown.